

Paulina Sebeso

There was a young woman in the village who was very interested in Gilbert's ideas. Her name was Paulina Sebeso. Like Mma-Millipede and Dinorego, Paulina came from the north of Botswana.

Paulina had not had a happy life. At the age of eighteen, she had married a man from Rhodesia²⁸. When he died, Paulina was left alone with two small children and no money. She now lived in Golema Mmidi, with Lorato, her little girl. Isaac, her son, lived at a cattle-post twenty miles away.

Paulina was tall and very thin. She was not very beautiful, but her black eyes were lovely. Paulina liked to wear brightly coloured skirts. People always looked at her beautiful long legs, as she hurried by.

Paulina's land was not far from the farm gates. Every evening, Makhaya stood at the gates to watch the sunset. And Paulina watched Makhaya with more and more interest. One evening, Paulina sent her little girl to Makhaya with a message.

'Sir,' the child said politely, 'my mother sends you greetings.'

'Who is your mother?' Makhaya asked in surprise.

The child pointed to Paulina. Makhaya saw a skirt as bright as the sunset and a pair of bright, black eyes.

'Go and tell your mother I don't know her,' he said. And he walked back to the farm.

Paulina went red with shame²⁹. She ran to her friend,



'Sir, my mother sends you greetings.'

Mma-Millipede and said, 'Oh Mama, I've made a terrible mistake!'

'No, no, my child,' Mma-Millipede said. 'You must remember that Makhaya is a foreigner³⁰. He doesn't understand our ways.'

Paulina was a friendly woman with strong feelings. She wanted to marry again, but she wanted to marry someone special. Someone like Makhaya.

'Perhaps he likes Maria,' Paulina said sadly.

'It's too early to say yet,' Mma-Millipede answered. 'But I think Maria is in love with Gilbert. And he certainly loves her.'

But Makhaya was too busy to be thinking of Paulina or Maria. He had too many other things to think about. He spent most of his time with Gilbert, listening to his plans for the village. Makhaya was enjoying the freedom of his new life. He remembered the dark life of South Africa. But politics fill a man's heart with hate. Makhaya was trying to forget his old life. He lived in Golema Mmidi now and his job was to help the people there.

Makhaya noticed that Maria was jealous of him. He saw that she kept away when he was talking to Gilbert. One day, Gilbert noticed it too.

'I wonder why Maria's keeping away from me?' Gilbert said. 'You don't love her too, do you?'

Makhaya smiled and shook his head. After a time, Gilbert stood up suddenly and walked quickly to Dinorego's yard.

The old man and his daughter were sitting by the fire. Gilbert greeted Dinorego quietly, but said nothing to Maria.

Maria looked nervous. Then she suddenly stood up and said, 'Would you like some tea, Gilbert?' And then she hurried into her hut.

Gilbert sat down and stared at the fire.

'What's the trouble, son?' the old man asked.

Gilbert looked up.

'I'm going to marry your daughter,' he said. 'Is that all right?'

Dinorego was so surprised that he did not know what to say. Then he called out, 'Maria! Did you hear? Gilbert wants to marry you. Do you agree?'

'Yes, Papa,' Maria said, coming out of the hut.

'And when will you get married, my son?' Dinorego asked politely.

'Tomorrow,' Gilbert replied.

Dinorego raised his hands in the air. He was pleased, of course. But everything was happening too quickly.

Gilbert stood up and walked along the dark path with Maria. Dinorego heard them laughing and arguing together, as they always did.

'I can't believe it,' Gilbert told Makhaya when he got home. 'I've been asking Maria to marry me for three years. Today she said "Yes". That's why I said we'd get married tomorrow. I don't want her to change her mind³¹.'

After Gilbert had left, Maria ran to tell Mma-Millipede the news.

'What's the hurry?' the old woman asked.

'Gilbert has been asking me to marry him for three years. I've kept him waiting too long,' Maria explained. 'But he talked so much about his ideas. I wasn't sure if he loved me. But now I know. And I also know I must look after him.'

When Maria said this, Mma-Millipede knew that everything would be all right. Her job was now to prepare for the wedding. The old woman thought for a moment and then she

said, 'Of course, we must have a party. We'll need two or three goats and some chickens. And rice.'

'We have plenty of rice,' Maria said.

'And what about a pretty wedding dress for you?' the old woman went on. 'We'll buy that tomorrow.'

Mma-Millipede stood up and put on her old jacket. 'We'll need help,' she said. 'Let's go to Paulina Sebeso. She will help us.'

The two women walked together through the darkness. They found Paulina by a bright fire. She was not very happy. She was thinking about the future. She jumped up when she saw Mma-Millipede and Maria.

'I have a surprise!' Mma-Millipede said.

When she heard the news, Paulina was very happy. She had to hide her happiness. So she turned away to put more wood on the fire.

Maria loved Gilbert, not Makhaya. Paulina wanted to dance with happiness!